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Panel on Education

Meeting on 11 April 2016

**Background brief on issues related to the
Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the deliberations and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on issues related to the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme ("MUSSS").

Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme

2. In the 2014 Policy Address, the Chief Executive ("CE") announced a series of initiatives to provide school leavers with broader and more diversified articulation pathways both within and outside Hong Kong. These initiatives included MUSSS, which was a new scheme to support needy students pursuing studies in Mainland undergraduate programmes under the Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions ("the Admission Scheme")¹. After consulting the Panel, the Administration submitted the relevant financial proposal to the Finance Committee ("FC"). The proposal was approved by FC in July 2014.

3. MUSSS will benefit three cohorts of students starting from the 2014-2015 academic year and then be subject to a review on its effectiveness. Needy Hong Kong students who are admitted to first-year undergraduate programmes by Mainland institutions under the Admission Scheme are eligible to apply for

¹ Implemented since the 2012-2013 academic year, the Admission Scheme is a collaboration project at the government-to-government level jointly taken forward by the Education Bureau of Hong Kong and the Ministry of Education in the Mainland. Under the Admission Scheme, Hong Kong students are exempted from taking the Mainland's Joint Entrance Examination. Mainland higher education institutions participating in the Admission Scheme can admit Hong Kong students based on their Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination results.

MUSSS. Under MUSSS, students who pass a means test will receive either a full-rate subsidy of HK\$15,000 or a half-rate subsidy of HK\$7,500 per student per year, depending on their needs. MUSSS is not subject to any quota. According to the Administration, in the 2014-2015 academic year, subsidy was provided to 263 students under MUSSS and the total amount of subsidy granted was over HK\$3 million. As for the 2015-2016 academic year, 336 applications were received. Of them, as at end 2015, 216 applicants have been vetted to be eligible to receive the subsidy under MUSSS². The total amount of subsidy to be granted in the 2015-2016 academic year (including subsidy renewal and newly approved applications) is estimated to be about HK\$6 million.

4. In the 2016 Policy Address, CE announced that the Administration would advance its review of ways to extend the scope of MUSSS, with a view to assisting more students with financial needs to pursue further studies in the Mainland.

Major views and concerns

5. Issues related to MUSSS have been considered by members at a number of Panel meetings in 2014, 2015 and 2016³, mainly in the context of policy briefings and increasing subsidized higher education opportunities. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Objective and level of subsidy

6. Some members queried why there was a big difference between the amount awarded to recipients under the Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme ("HKSES")⁴ and that under MUSSS. As explained by the

² According to the latest information provided by the Administration, there are 236 new recipients under MUSSS in the 2015-2016 academic year.

³ Members discussed issues related to MUSSS at the Panel meetings on 27 January and 14 April 2014, 16 January 2015 and 15 January 2016.

⁴ Launched in November 2014, HKSES comprises a scholarship for academically outstanding students to cover tuition fees, subject to a maximum of HK\$250,000, and a means-tested bursary of up to HK\$200,000 per student per year, to study in world renowned universities outside Hong Kong. According to the Administration, the amount of scholarship and means-tested bursary awarded under HKSES have been set with reference to the tuition fees and living expenses overseas, including Europe and North America. HKSES will benefit three cohorts of students starting from the 2015-2016 academic year, after which its effectiveness will be reviewed.

Administration, the objective and nature of HKSES and MUSSS were different. While HKSES was primarily a scholarship scheme for academically outstanding students, MUSSS aimed to provide financial assistance to secondary school leavers pursuing further studies under the Admission Scheme. Hence, the means-tested subsidy under MUSSS had taken into account the tuition fees and living expenses in the Mainland.

7. Some members expressed concern that initiatives such as MUSSS had been introduced with a view to easing the pressure on the Administration to increase local subsidized undergraduate places. In this connection, the Administration reiterated that MUSSS aimed at providing financial assistance to local students to pursue further studies in the Mainland as one of the pathways for higher education. It was also in line with the policy objective to promote the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination as the primary channel for articulation within and outside Hong Kong.

8. Noting from the 2016 Policy Address that the Administration would advance its review on MUSSS, some members enquired about the adjustment, if any, of the amount of subsidy. In reply, the Administration advised that consideration would be given to adjusting the amount of subsidy with reference to the level of tuition fees of Mainland institutions.

Scope and eligibility criteria

9. The Administration had been asked to consider providing subsidy to students pursuing post-secondary studies in nearby places outside Hong Kong, notably Taiwan and Macau, in addition to the Mainland. In this regard, the Administration advised that the scope of MUSSS would cover post-secondary programmes pursued at those Mainland institutions participating in the Admission Scheme which was the only government-to-government initiative on supporting Hong Kong students studying outside Hong Kong. The academic qualifications attained by local students upon graduation from these Mainland institutions would be recognized for the purpose of pursuing further study in tertiary institutions in Hong Kong.

10. Some members enquired whether, as a result of the review, the Administration would extend MUSSS to cover Mainland institutions not participating in the Admission Scheme. Some other members also enquired whether local sub-degree graduates could apply under MUSSS to articulate to undergraduate studies in the Mainland. In response, the Administration advised that it would explore the feasibility of expanding the scope of MUSSS so as to benefit more students, such as Hong Kong students already pursuing undergraduate programmes in Mainland institutions and local sub-degree graduates.

Latest position

11. The Administration will brief members on the results of the review of MUSSS and the proposed enhancements at the Panel meeting to be held on 11 April 2016.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	27.1.2014	Agenda CB(4)323/13-14(01) Minutes
Panel on Education	14.4.2014 (Item V)	Agenda CB(4)720/13-14(01) Minutes
Finance Committee	12.7.2014 (Item No. 12)	FCR(2014-15)15 Minutes of the 33rd meeting Minutes of the 34th meeting
Panel on Education	16.1.2015	Agenda CB(4)358/14-15(01) Minutes
Panel on Education	15.1.2016	Agenda CB(4)480/15-16(01)